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OFFICE OF
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MEMORANDUM

Romania: Maverick in Trouble?

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20 May 1970

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

20 May 1970

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Romania: Maverick in Trouble?*

On 18 May -- at a time when the Romanian Government was faced with urgent problems generated by major floods -- Ceausescu unexpectedly departed for Moscow at the head of a high-level Party delegation to meet with top Soviet leaders. The talks were brief, ending on 19 May (as this memorandum was going to press), but they apparently covered a broad range of subjects on which the Soviets and Romanians are known to differ. The wording of the initial TASS report suggests that the Romanians gave little ground. Together with Moscow's generally tougher posture toward Romania in recent months, this meeting raises the possibility that the Soviets might resort to extreme measures in an effort to reestablish their authority over Romania.

This paper -- after discussing the nature of Soviet behavior toward Romania since the beginning of the year -- assesses the various military, economic, and political options open to Moscow. It argues that if Soviet pressures are growing, so too is Bucharest's ability to withstand them. And it suggests that, for this and other reasons, the odds at present are against a sudden and dramatic Soviet military move or the imposition of severe economic sanctions.

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* This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated with the Office of Current Intelligence, the Office of Economic Research, the Special Research Staff, and with the Clandestine Service.

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Thunder in the East (Again)

1. The opening months of 1970 have seen an intensification of the war of nerves being waged against Bucharest by Moscow. Former ground rules still hold to the extent that the Kremlin continues to refrain from publicly naming names. But press and radio attacks on readily identifiable Romanian positions have become more frequent and, to Bucharest, more ominous. The Soviets have warned that giving priority to national interests over international duties or underestimating the "imperialist danger" (including insidious "bridge-building" tactics) means "breaking with Marxism-Leninism." They have reminded the Romanians of the lasting historical significance of the July 1968 Warsaw Pact letter to the Dubcek regime and of the subsequent "fraternal assistance" rendered to the Czechoslovak people by the armies of five Warsaw Pact powers. They have invoked Lenin to condemn those who resist socialist economic and military "unification." And Warsaw Pact Commander-in-Chief Yakubovsky has commented ominously that even the "slightest failure" to observe "internationalist interests in the field of the defense of socialism" is absolutely inadmissible.

2. The Soviets have supplemented these public warnings with other actions calculated to underscore their impatience

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and concern. While allowance must be made for possible coincidence and the individual exercise of initiative, it would appear that part of the message has been especially intended for Washington. For example, last January Ambassador Dobrynin made a curious and belated effort to obtain "inside information" from the State Department concerning President Nixon's visit to Bucharest some five months earlier. Shortly thereafter, US Embassy officials in Bucharest were advised by Soviet sources -- first by a TASS correspondent and then by a senior diplomat -- that Ceausescu had been "invited" to come to Moscow a few days in advance of the Lenin Centennial celebrations to discuss bilateral problems.* And more recently, the Soviet Ambassador to Romania called on his American counterpart with some very prying questions about Sargent Shriver's unofficial visit to Bucharest in February.

3. In the background, the Soviets have been flexing their military muscle in a series of Warsaw Pact and national

* As it developed, Ceausescu limited his Lenin Anniversary visit to Moscow to the minimum time demanded by protocol. On 18 May, however, he returned unexpectedly to the Soviet capital at the head of a high-level Party delegation, presumably at Soviet behest. Ceausescu's send-off at the Bucharest airport was carefully staged to demonstrate to the Soviets that his foreign and domestic policies enjoyed solid popular and Party support. Once in Moscow, Ceausescu was almost certainly subjected to strong Soviet pressures on a variety of topics, centering no doubt on Romania's role in the Warsaw Pact and in CEMA. It may be some time before much is known about what actually took place at the talks, but there are now no indications that the Ceausescu regime compromised on any major issues. Additional light may be shed on Soviet-Romanian differences by further polemics in the press and by developments at the meeting of the Warsaw Pact Council of Defense Ministers likely to be held in Sofia later this month.

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war games. Some Western observers believe that the recent Dvina maneuvers were intended to convey -- through their North-South scenario and the accompanying commentary -- a special warning to Bucharest. Perhaps this is overstating the case, for the tactics and composition of the opposing forces suggest that the Soviets may even have been simulating a Sino-Soviet problem. Nevertheless, Radio Moscow did devote more time to coverage of these maneuvers in its Romanian language programs than in its broadcasts to any other target audience in Europe. And west of the Urals, at least, any large-scale display of troops and weaponry which the Soviets can bring to bear "in defense of socialism" carries unpleasant implications for the Romanians -- particularly when at the same time they are being lectured on their ideological sins.

4. Moscow clearly hopes that the cumulative effect of its varied actions and pronouncements since the beginning of the year will exert a sobering influence on policy-makers in Bucharest and perhaps in Washington as well. The big questions remain, however: Is the Kremlin on the verge of a decision to translate threats into deeds? And short of military intervention, what can the Soviets reasonably hope to do

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which might bring about the desired changes in Romanian behavior within a relatively brief period of time?

The View from the Kremlin

5. Moscow's recent intensification of pressure on Bucharest is somewhat unusual. Painful as it has been for the Soviets, the Romanians have long and consistently adhered to the foreign policy principles they first aired in the early 1960s. Naturally, this has imparted a certain continuing coolness to relations between Bucharest and Moscow. But periods of particular tension have generally been tied to some dramatic display of Romanian independence. This time, however, an obvious cause and effect sequence seems to be lacking. While Ceausescu has been taking advantage of every possible opportunity to publicize and reaffirm his policies, he has done nothing in recent months to compare, say, with his publicly stated opposition to the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

6. The Kremlin's increased surliness could, of course, reflect some shift in the balance of forces within the Soviet leadership. In any case, it is probably at least partially attributable to Moscow's evident determination to squeeze

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maximum mileage out of the Lenin centenary year in its drive to strengthen Soviet authority in the Communist world. In addition, the Soviets have some particularly pressing reasons for wishing to insure that dissident parties -- ruling and non-ruling alike -- keep their heads down at this time. Not since the immediate aftermath of World War II has the Kremlin been involved in such a broad range of delicate and important negotiations. Under the circumstances, the appearance of a united, pro-Moscow front becomes something more than a simple desideratum. This is true with respect to the Kremlin's talks with Washington and Peking, but especially so with regard to Soviet policies in Europe. Clearly, Moscow wants its allies in Eastern Europe to close ranks behind the USSR and support a coordinated policy toward West Germany and the other NATO powers.

7. In this context, long-standing Soviet problems with Romania have assumed a new importance. Bucharest, of course, has for some time constituted a serious complicating factor for the USSR within Eastern Europe itself. The Soviets are concerned that Romanian emphasis on national interests is contagious, and they are upset by Romania's ability to impede progress toward a more effective CEMA and a tighter Warsaw

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Pact. On a more general level, Romania (among others) stands squarely in the way of efforts to legitimize the universal validity of Soviet doctrine and practice. It also hinders the USSR's attempts to isolate and condemn the Chinese and other anti-Soviet Communists.

8. Beyond these grievances, at least two relatively new considerations may be troubling the Soviet leadership. First of all, there is probably genuine uncertainty in the Kremlin over the implications of what appear to be increasingly friendly relations between Bucharest and Washington. It is not only a question of the potential significance of this development with respect to Romanian and Eastern European affairs. It may also be that Romania's "neutral" position in the Sino-Soviet dispute has caused at least some in the Kremlin to suspect that Washington may be looking beyond Bucharest to Peking. In any event, the Soviets have given clear indications of their uneasiness over high-level American-Romanian contacts, including Ceausescu's apparent desire to visit the United States this year.

9. There is also the matter, sometimes overlooked in the West, of Ceausescu's internal policies. From Moscow's point of view, the Romanian leader's political conservatism and

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emphasis on Party primacy are not -- in and of themselves -- clear-cut proof of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. It is true that Ceausescu has carefully retained those aspects of a traditional communist system which facilitate control by the political machine he commands. At the same time, however, he has not hesitated to "adjust" Soviet-accepted internal formulas and practices to suit Bucharest's particular interests. Many such changes have been introduced since the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, and -- like a number of trends and developments of earlier vintage -- most of these have had definite nationalistic and anti-Soviet undertones.

10. Several of the moves which Ceausescu has made have been in direct response to the threat of Soviet military intervention. Thus, resurrection of the Patriotic Guards (a paramilitary organization now claiming one million members) served to underscore Romania's determination to offer armed resistance to any invader. Legislation which formally established the Defense Council in March 1969 gave Ceausescu complete control over the planning and operations of the Romanian armed forces and, on paper at least, over the disposition and movements of any troops on Romanian soil. And the Romanians now insist that the entry of foreign troops into

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their country for any purpose required advance approval by the Grand National Assembly. This interpretation of the parliament's constitutional prerogatives serves two purposes: it strengthens Bucharest's hand in dealing with Soviet pressures on Romania to play host for Warsaw Pact exercises, and it brands as illegal (in advance) any possible attempt by a disgruntled individual or group -- acting with Soviet encouragement -- to invite in Romania's "allies" for a bit of house-cleaning.

11. Ceausescu has not neglected the danger of possible Soviet exploitation of factionalism or dissidence within the Romanian Party or government to bring about his downfall. He has continued to employ the time-honored technique of far-reaching personnel and administrative shuffles, both to consolidate his personal position and to increase the chances that his policies will be carried forward should he be removed from the scene. In the process, he has further encouraged the growth of something approaching a personality cult around his own figure -- a practice which Moscow of course deems particularly objectionable if pursued by Communist leaders with independent inclinations. And to top things off, Ceausescu -- presumably with Khrushchev's fate in mind -- has had Party

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statutes changed so as to provide for the election of the First Secretary by the Party Congress (normally convened every five years) rather than by the Central Committee.

12. Finally, the nature and tempo of Ceausescu's campaign to broaden his popular support must be disturbing to the Soviets. From the outset, the Romanian Party leader's nationalistic stance has been the key element in his domestic appeal. But over the past 18 months, he has intensified his efforts to increase popular enthusiasm for -- and identification with -- his policies. He set up the Front of Socialist Unity and the Hungarian and German Nationality Councils, for example, to propagandize regime policies and to give citizens of all social and ethnic backgrounds a feeling of participation in political processes. More recently, he established an Academy of Social and Political Sciences to set doctrinal and historical matters in their proper Romanian perspective.

13. At the very least, all these moves, and others like them, must strengthen fears in the Kremlin that the Romanian Party, while still firmly in control, has all but gone over to "anti-Marxist," nationalist positions. And while rampant liberalism does not seem to be just around the corner in Bucharest, Soviet pessimists could argue that Ceausescu's

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growing cooperation with Yugoslavia and the Western "imperialists" may in time lead to this form of ideological heresy as well.

A Military Solution?

14. Have things finally reached the stage where Moscow might be on the verge of adopting a Czechoslovak-type scenario for Romania? The problems posed for the Soviets by Ceausescu are generally quite different and certainly less urgent than those generated by the Prague Spring in 1968. It does not necessarily follow, of course, that the Brezhnev regime would therefore seek a different and less drastic solution. Certainly, the events of 1968 did little to establish the limits of the Kremlin's tolerance of lesser provocations. And although any military move against Romania would have inescapable and unpleasant international ramifications, some Soviets might argue that memories are short, and that -- as in the case of Czechoslovakia -- the setbacks would be only temporary.

15. Warsaw Pact maneuvering -- both meetings and exercises -- of the type which preceded the extension of "fraternal assistance" to Czechoslovakia has not materialized

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so far. But Moscow's continuing efforts to bulldoze Bucharest into hosting Warsaw Pact exercises on Romanian soil do, to some extent, parallel pressures initially brought to bear on Prague in the Spring of 1968. This Soviet behavior may be aimed only at political goals -- such as the erosion of Ceausescu's domestic and international position. On the other hand, the Kremlin's patience may indeed have run out. If this is the case, any response that Bucharest might make to demands for large-scale Warsaw Pact maneuvers on Romanian territory could provide an opening for military intervention. Unqualified Romanian acquiescence could pave the way for the establishment of an overwhelming Soviet military presence. Refusal or continued delaying tactics could serve as a pretext for Soviet invasion.

16. But the arguments against a Soviet power play are strong. The chances that military intervention could be accomplished neatly -- even under the cover of a legitimately arranged Warsaw Pact exercise -- seem to have been declining for over a year. The Romanians, in fact, have built their political defenses well. They may, in time, agree to play host for some sort of Warsaw Pact ground forces training venture -- but not without strings affecting the

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size, locale, and duration of the exercise. Among other things, Bucharest can be expected to insist that Moscow first accept certain conditions which would effectively preclude the conversion of the exercise into a military occupation (e.g., a tight limit on the number of Soviet personnel allowed to enter the country). Further, the Romanians would be likely to insure that the terms of any understanding they had reached with Moscow received some public ventilation, partly to minimize domestic repercussions but mainly to inhibit the Soviets.

17. Under these circumstances, the Soviets would have to violate pledges given -- and probably publicized -- in order to introduce and deploy sufficient forces to effect the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime. Such a course of action would carry with it the risk of bloodshed. The more direct course -- outright invasion -- could be messier still. The Romanians may have a centuries-old reputation for passivity, but Moscow found them a willing and not totally ineffective adversary during World War II. In any case, the Kremlin simply cannot be sure that the Romanians would not fight, especially in view of the warning signal sent by Bucharest when it reestablished the Patriotic Guards.

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18. For Moscow, organized armed resistance, no matter how brief, is a sobering prospect. The aftereffects would unquestionably be more severe and longer lasting than those which stemmed from the more or less bloodless invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Kremlin would have to weigh the likely impact of such a development on its policies in Western Europe, its SALT negotiations with the US, its relations with Peking, and its efforts to contain centrifugal forces operating within the international Communist movement. It seems likely that Ceausescu has successfully made his point and that the Soviet leadership continues to view the possible costs of a military solution to the Romanian problem as unacceptable -- at least so long as there is no dramatic, new anti-Soviet turn in Bucharest's policies.

By Other Means

19. Moscow's record for subduing fractious Communist regimes through political and economic pressure alone is not one in which the Kremlin can take great pride. Nevertheless, hope may spring eternal. The Soviets may believe that Romania's geographic location, its relative economic dependence on the Soviet Bloc, and the potentially fragile foundations of Ceausescu's popular support just might

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provide the openings and leverage needed to tip the scales. In any event, there are lessons to be learned from past failures. Both sides recognize that Romania's ability to develop and maintain actual or potential sources of economic and political support outside the Soviet Bloc will be a critical factor. And both sides have adjusted their tactics accordingly.

20. The Economic Arena: The Romanians began deliberate efforts to reduce their economic dependence on their CEMA partners about ten years ago. As the result, the share of these countries in Romanian foreign trade has dropped from about three-fourths to a little less than half. The Soviet Union's individual share has declined proportionately, recently leveling off at something under 30 percent. Even so, trade with Communist neighbors remains quite important to Romania's economy. This is particularly true with respect to the import of raw materials needed for the country's steel, machine-building, and textile industries, and to the sale of Romanian machines and other manufactured goods too low in quality for ready disposal on the world market. Thus, while the situation is likely to improve over time, Romania is still potentially quite vulnerable to severe CEMA-imposed

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economic sanctions. It has been estimated, for example, that total severance of trade with the Soviet Bloc would result in a temporary drop of as much as 20 percent in Romanian industrial production and an accompanying loss of jobs by as many as 350,000 workers.

21. There are, however, a number of reasons why the Soviets would be reluctant to impose a complete embargo on trade with Romania. The international ramifications of such a move, while obviously less severe than those which might stem from military intervention, would almost certainly be unpleasant. Rather than turning the population against Ceausescu, economic privations forced upon the Romanian people by Soviet action might only further unite them behind him. Efforts to impose and enforce the embargo would almost certainly add new strains in Moscow's relations with its other European allies and might even result in new and embarrassing displays of independent behavior.

22. Finally, a trade embargo, far from humbling Romania, might simply drive the country closer to the West. With Western assistance, the prospects for Romanian economic recovery would be good. And the Soviets have no good reason to believe that the West, after some predictable

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confusion and delays, would not extend a helping hand to Ceausescu. Readjustment and reorientation of the Romanian economy would, of course, take time. But in the short term, until necessary credit and other aid arrangements could be made, Romania would be in the fortunate position of being able to draw on substantial gold reserves to cushion the shock of trade dislocation. While not a critical factor, a cooperative Yugoslavia could be expected to do all it could to assist Bucharest and to facilitate an increased flow of trade between Romania and the West.

23. Although an actual trade embargo appears unlikely, Romania does have some economic problems which could be aggravated by more subtle Soviet tactics. The Soviets will probably maintain a facade of "normal" inter-state relations, but they are unlikely to eschew certain lesser forms of harassment (deliberate haggling, delivery "problems," and the like) designed to keep the Ceausescu regime off balance and aware of the importance of its CEMA ties. The Romanian economy does not seem to be in such precarious circumstances, however, that Bucharest might now be more vulnerable to this type of economic pressure than in the past. In fact, the limited decentralization, administrative

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streamlining, and managerial improvement envisaged in the Ceausescu regime's relatively conservative program of reform may soon begin to have some positive impact on Romanian economic performance. In any event, Romania has not yet reached that stage of industrial development where the shortcomings of a command economy threaten to become critical. Its short and medium term prospects for further economic growth are generally favorable.

24. The Political Arena: The Kremlin's political maneuvers will continue to be designed to take advantage of the atmosphere of insecurity generated by the overhanging threat of military intervention. Aside from direct approaches to the Romanian leaders, the Soviets have a variety of options running the gamut from efforts to overthrow Ceausescu to actions on the international plane calculated to embarrass and weaken the Romanian regime both abroad and at home. Since the domestic and international aspects of Romania's political situation are closely interrelated, moves in one sector could have significant ramifications in the other. Unfortunately, information on popular attitudes, political factionalism, and other possible barometers of Romanian internal stability is sketchy and sometimes contradictory. Nevertheless, it would appear

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that Ceausescu's vulnerability to Soviet political pressure and subversion has declined over the past year.

25. Many of the steps Ceausescu has taken to strengthen his domestic position have already been mentioned. He has not, of course, eliminated all meaningful dissension -- even within the Party. But he appears to have neutralized (through retirement, demotion, or relative isolation) most of those leaders who might be inclined to support a challenge to his rule. Thus, whatever success Moscow has had in enlisting the cooperation of disgruntled Romanian apparatchiks, Soviet chances for engineering a successful palace coup -- probably never very good -- seem to have dimmed. Nor does Ceausescu's current rapport with the masses appear to be in imminent jeopardy, even though his recent efforts to broaden his popular support may take some time to bear even modest fruit. It is true that food shortages have caused some grumbling, as has the campaign to shift a sizeable segment of the economic bureaucracy out of Bucharest and into the outlying regions. But for all the faults Ceausescu's subjects may find with his regime, it is doubtful that many see a feasible alternative which would satisfy their nationalistic sensitivities as well. And since the Romanian population's current attitude toward Ceausescu has roots

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extending back a number of years, it is likely to be at least somewhat shock-resistant. For example, despite the doubts and fears which would be generated by an agreement to hold a limited Warsaw Pact exercise on Romanian soil, the odds are that Ceausescu's popular support would survive such a test.

26. On the international plane, the Soviets will continue their efforts to exploit the dilemmas created for the Romanians by Bucharest's desire to retain membership in good standing in the "socialist community." But the existing state of affairs in that "community" renders Moscow's task most difficult. For instance, the Kremlin's ability to forge CEMA and the Warsaw Pact into more effective instruments of Soviet control -- with the attendant effect of curbing Romanian independence -- has been limited by the divergency of views among the members of those organizations. While more discreet than the Romanians, most Eastern European regimes entertain distinct reservations about surrendering additional bits and pieces of their sovereignty to Moscow -- either directly in the name of socialist solidarity or indirectly through the medium of Soviet-dominated supranational bodies. Rhetoric extolling

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proletarian internationalism flows freely, but when hard facts are faced -- such as the question of CEMA integration, the formation of international Warsaw Pact contingents, and the bounds of permissible economic contact and cooperation with the West -- Moscow has so far found it nearly impossible to line up a solid front against Romania. And so long as Ceausescu continues to play his cards well, there is little reason to believe that the Soviets will find this chore much easier in the future.

27. Indeed, the Warsaw Pact call for a conference on European Security (CES) has given Bucharest new room for maneuver. Moscow's interest in promoting such a meeting serves as an added deterrent to harsh moves against Romania. At the same time, the project provides a natural excuse and opportunity for the expansion of Romanian contacts with the West. Regardless of Soviet objectives, it is clearly to Ceausescu's advantage to keep the CES idea alive. On the other hand, it is distinctly not in his interest to have the meeting and its preparations degenerate into a de facto affirmation of spheres of influence and the derivative legitimacy of the "Brezhnev Doctrine." And from Bucharest's point of view, such a development would almost inevitably result from any bloc-to-bloc approach to CES.

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28. Under the circumstances, Romanian uneasiness over proposals for the establishment of a CES preparatory commission composed of representatives drawn from one NATO, one Warsaw Pact, and one "neutral" country is understandable. Apparently favored by Moscow, this course of action would threaten to force Romania into unwelcome alignment behind a Soviet-designated Warsaw Pact spokesman. It would appear that Bucharest's recent call for a CES preparatory meeting of foreign ministry representatives from all the concerned countries (including the US and Canada) was an independent -- if somewhat hastily conceived -- initiative intended to ward off this "troika" concept, and that it annoyed Moscow. The Kremlin's coolness notwithstanding, it seems likely that Bucharest will try to keep its proposal alive as long as it can, possibly following it up with new ideas in the same spirit at appropriate intervals.

In Sum...

29. Legend claims that purity of heart sometimes gives "the strength of ten" to embattled heroes. Of course, Romania magnified tenfold would still be no match for the Soviet Union. And it does somewhat strain the imagination to picture the Romanians as, say, simple and virtuous Knights

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of the Round Table. But the fact remains that whereas the Soviet Union has sought to increase the psychological impact of its power through ominous ambiguity, Bucharest has labored to build a consistent moral and legal case in its quest for sympathy and support at home and abroad. Ceausescu has taken advantage of every suitable domestic and international forum to reiterate and clarify those principles of international conduct which are important to Romania's continued survival and relative independence, principles which all signatories of the United Nations Charter are committed to uphold. And the cloak of righteousness is not without effect. It is difficult to isolate or blacken a country which professes friendship for all and which pledges fulfillment of all international obligations (including those stemming from membership in CEMA and the Warsaw Pact) which are consistent with generally accepted norms of international behavior. Such have been Ceausescu's tactics in the past, and such they will undoubtedly remain in the future.

30. Of course, in addition to this "moral" approach, Ceausescu and his principal lieutenants have demonstrated their skill as tough and resourceful politicians in a long

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series of direct confrontations with their Soviet counterparts. Practicing a mild form of extortion, Bucharest appears to have traded, in part, on its ability to stir up still more trouble for the Soviets if treated too shabbily. It has, for example, discreetly kept the Bessarabia/Bukovina issue alive. Such tactics carry some risk. But Ceausescu has so far demonstrated a fine sense of how far he can go without inviting disaster.

31. Ceausescu, of course, could miscalculate. Unforeseen developments affecting the Soviet Union's relations with Washington or Peking -- or the alignment of forces within the Kremlin itself -- might intervene to change the prospects for Romania. Barring such developments, however, the chances appear better than even that no dramatic events affecting Bucharest's unique position in the "socialist community" are just below the horizon. Ceausescu will be lectured and bullied. But the Soviets are likely to continue to hesitate to employ severe military or economic sanctions against him. Political pressures may persuade Ceausescu to make tactical concessions on issues he considers to be relatively minor. But the Romanian leader's domestic and international defenses against such Soviet pressures seem to be strong enough to permit him to

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avoid major compromise of his position over the next year or two. Certainly, he shows no sign of weakening at present.

32. In the longer run, there are too many factors which might influence Romania's fortunes to permit confident predictions. But it would appear that the Soviets have no more cause for optimism than the West. Of course, the option of force will remain -- but it may well become steadily harder and more costly to adopt.

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